

JESUS AT BETHESDA—OR WAITING CHANGED FOR BELIEVING NO. 744

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 7, 1867,
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AT THE AGRICULTURAL HALL, ISLINGTON.

“After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he said unto him, Will you be made whole? The impotent man answered him, sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steps down before me. Jesus said unto him, Rise, take up your bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the Sabbath.”
John 5:1-9.

THE scene of this miracle was Bethesda, a pool, according to the evangelist, adjoining the sheep market, or near to the sheep gate—the place through which, I suppose, the cattle consumed by the inhabitants of Jerusalem would be driven. And the pool where, perhaps, the sheep intended for sale to the offerers in the temple were washed. So common was sickness in the days of the Savior, that the infirmities of men intruded upon the place which had been allotted to cattle, and the place where sheep had been washed became the spot where sick folk congregated in great multitudes, longing for a cure.

We do not hear that anyone remonstrated at the intrusion, or that public opinion was shocked. The needs of mankind must override all considerations of taste. A hospital must have preference over the sheep market. This day you have another case in point. If the physical infirmities of Jerusalem intruded into the sheep market, I shall ask no excuse if, on these Sabbath days, the spiritual sickness of London should demand that this spacious place, which has hitherto been given up to the lowing of cattle and to the bleating of sheep, should be consecrated to the preaching of the Gospel, to the manifestation of the healing virtue of Christ Jesus among the spiritually sick. This day there is by the sheep market a pool, and impotent folk are here in exceeding great multitudes.

We might never have heard of Bethesda, if an august visitor had not condescended to honor it with His presence—Jesus, the Son of God, walked in the five porches by the pool. It was the place where we might expect to meet Him, for where should the physician be found if not in the place where the sick are gathered? Here was work for Jesus' healing hand and restoring word. It was but natural that the Son of Man, who “came to seek and to save that which was lost,” should make His way to the sick by the side of the pool. That gracious visit is Bethesda's glory. This has lifted up the name of this pool out of the common rank of the springs and waters of the earth.

O that King Jesus might come into this place this morning! This would be the glory of this Hall, for which it should be famous in eternity. If Jesus would be here to heal, the remarkable size of the congregation would cease to be a wonder, and the renown of Jesus and His saving love would eclipse all else, as the sun puts out the stars. My brethren, Jesus will be here, for there are those who know Him and

have power with Him, who have been asking for His presence. The Lord's favored people, by prevailing cries and tears, have won from Him His consent to be in our midst this day, and He is walking amid this throng as ready to heal and as mighty to save as in the days of His flesh. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," is an assurance which comforts the preacher's heart this morning. A present Savior—present in the power of the Holy Ghost—shall make this day to be remembered by many who shall be made whole.

I ask the earnest attention of all, and I entreat of believers their fervent assisting prayers while I first bid you observe *the sick man*. Secondly, direct your attentive eye *to the Great Physician*. And thirdly, *make an application of the whole narrative to the present case*.

I. In order to observe THE PATIENT, I shall ask you to go with me to the pool with the five porches, around which the sick are lying.

Walk tenderly amongst the groups of lame and blind! Nay, do not close your eyes. It will do you good to see the sorrowful sight, to mark what sin has done and to what sorrows our father Adam has made us heirs.

Why are they all here? They are here because sometimes the waters bubble up with a healing virtue. Whether visibly stirred by an angel or not it is not necessary for us to discuss. But it was generally believed that an angel descended and touched the water—this rumor attracted the sick from all quarters. As soon as the stir was seen in the waters, the whole mass probably leaped into the pool—those who could not leap themselves were pushed in by their attendants.

Alas! How small the result! Many were disappointed. Only one was rewarded for the leap. Whosoever *first* stepped in was healed, but only the first. For the poor and meager chance of winning this cure the sick folk lingered in Bethesda's arches year after year. The impotent man in the narrative had most likely spent the better part of his thirty-eight years in waiting at this famous pool, buoyed up by the slender hope that he might one day be first of the throng. On the Sabbath mentioned in the text, the angel had not come to him, but something better had come, for Jesus Christ, the angel's Master was there.

Note concerning this man that *he was fully aware of his sickness*. He did not dispute the failure of his health—he was an impotent man. He felt it and he owned it. He was not like some present this morning, who are lost by nature, but who do not know it, or will not confess it. He was conscious that he needed heavenly help, and his waiting at the pool showed it. Are there not many in this assembly who are equally convinced on this point? You have for a long time felt that you are a sinner, and have known that unless grace shall save you, saved you never can be. You are no atheist, no denier of the Gospel. On the contrary, you firmly believe the Bible, and heartily wish that you had a saving part in Christ Jesus. But for the present you have advanced no further than to feel that you are sick, to desire to be healed, and to own that the cure must come from above. So far, so good, but it is not good to stop here.

The impotent man, thus desiring to be healed, *waited by the pool*, expecting some sign and wonder. He hoped that an angel would suddenly burst open the golden gates and touch the waters which were now calm and stagnant, and that he then might be healed. This, too, my dear hearers, is the thought of many of those who feel their sins and who desire salvation. They accept that unscriptural and dangerous advice given to them by a certain class of ministers. They wait at the pool of Bethesda. They persevere in the formal use of means and ordinances, and continue in unbelief, expecting some great thing. They abide in a continued refusal to obey the Gospel, and yet expect that all of a sudden they will experience some strange emotions, singular feelings, or remarkable impressions. They hope to see a vision, or hear a supernatural voice, or be alarmed with deliriums of horror.

Now, dear friends, we will not deny that a few persons have been saved by very singular interpositions of God's hand, in a manner altogether out of the ordinary modes of divine procedure. We should be very foolish if we were for instance to dispute the truth of such a conversion as that of Colonel Gardiner, who, the very night when he made an appointment to commit sin, was stopped and converted by a vision of Christ upon the cross, which, at any rate, he thought he saw, and by hearing or imagining

that he heard the voice of the Savior tenderly pleading with him. It were idle to dispute that such cases have occurred, do occur, and may occur again.

I must, however, beg unconverted people not to look for such interpositions in their own cases. When the Lord bids you believe in Jesus, what right have you to demand signs and wonders instead? Jesus Himself is the greatest of all wonders. My dear hearer, for you to wait for remarkable experiences is as futile as was the waiting of the multitude who lingered at Bethesda waiting for the long-expected angel, when He who could heal them stood already in their midst, neglected and despised by them. What a piteous spectacle, to see them gazing into the clouds when the physician who could heal them was present, and they offered Him no petitions, and sought no mercy at His hands.

In dealing with the method of waiting to see or to feel some great thing, we remark, that *it is not the way which God has bidden His servants preach*. I challenge the whole world to find any Gospel of God in which an unconverted man is told to abide in unbelief. Where is the sinner told to wait upon God in the use of ordinances, that so he may be saved? The Gospel of our salvation is this—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved."

When our Lord gave His commission to His disciples, He said, "Go you into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." And what was that Gospel? Tell them to wait in their unbelief in the use of means and ordinances till they see some great thing? Tell them to be diligent in prayer, and read the Word of God, until they feel better? Not an atom of it. Thus says the Lord, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned."

This was the Gospel and the only Gospel which Jesus Christ ever bade His ministers preach, and they who say, wait for feelings! wait for impressions! wait for wonders! They preach another Gospel which is not another, but there be some that trouble you. The lifting up of Christ on the cross is the saving work of the Gospel ministry, and in the cross of Jesus lies the hope of men. "Look unto me and be you saved, all the ends of the earth," is God's Gospel. "Wait at the pool," is man's Gospel, and has destroyed its thousands.

This ungospel-like gospel of waiting is *immensely popular*. I should not wonder if well nigh half of you are satisfied with it. O my hearers, you do not refuse to fill the seats in our places of worship. You are seldom absent when the doors are open, but there you sit in confirmed unbelief, waiting for windows to be made in heaven, and neglecting the Gospel of your salvation. The great command of God, "Believe and live," has no response from you but a deaf ear, and a stony heart, while you quiet your consciences with outward religious observances.

If God had said, "Sit in those seats and wait," I would be bold to urge it upon you with tears. But God has not said so. He has said, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him." He has not said, "Wait," but He Has said, "Seek you the LORD while he may be found, call you upon him while he is near." "Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." I find Jesus saying nothing to sinners about waiting, but very much about coming. "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Why is this way so very popular? It is because *it administers laudanum to the conscience*. When the minister preaches with power, and the hearer's heart is touched, the devil says, "Wait for a more convenient season." Thus the arch enemy pours his deadly drug into the soul, and the sinner instead of trusting in Jesus on the spot, or falling on bended knees with tearful eye, crying for mercy, flatters himself because he is in the use of the means—which use of means is well enough as far as it goes, but which is bad as bad can be when it comes into the place of Christ crucified. A child ought to hear its parent's command, but what if the child puts hearing into the place of obeying? God forbid that I should glory in your listening to the Gospel, if you are hearers only—my glory is in the cross, and unless you look to the cross, it were better for you that you had never been born.

I ask the candid attention of everyone who has thus been waiting, while I mention one or two points. My dear friend, is not this waiting *a very hopeless business* after all? Out of those who waited at Bethesda, how very few were ever healed! He who stepped down *first* into the pool was cured, but all the rest came up from the pool just as they went in. Ah! my hearers, I tremble for some of you—you chapel-goers and church-goers, who have for years been waiting, how few of you get saved! Thousands of you die in your sins, waiting in wicked unbelief. A few are snatched like brands from the burning, but the most of those who are hardened waiters, wait, and wait, till they die in their sins.

I solemnly warn you that, pleasing to the flesh as waiting in unbelief may be, it is not one which any reasonable man would long persevere in. For, my friend, are not you in your own person an instance of its hopelessness? You have been waiting for years. You can scarcely remember when you first went to a place of worship. Your mother carried you there in her arms, and you have been nurtured under the shadow of the sanctuary, like the swallows that build their nests under God's altars, and what has your unbelieving waiting done for you? Has it made you a Christian? No. You are still without God, without Christ, without hope.

I shall put it to you in God's name—what right have you to expect that if you wait another thirty years, you will be at all different from what you are now? Are not the probabilities most strong that at sixty you will be as graceless as you are at thirty? For, let me say it, and I dare say it without egotism, some of you have listened to the Gospel preached to you in no mincing manner. My dear hearers, I have been as plain with you as I know how to be. I have never shunned to declare the whole counsel of God, nor even to pick out an individual case and deal with it closely. Short of actually mentioning people's names, I have hardly stopped, but I have sought to commend the Gospel to the conscience of every man as in the sight of God.

Remember the warnings you had in Exeter Hall—some of you recollect the breakings down you felt in the Surrey Gardens. Remember the invitations which have already come to you in this very Hall. And if all these have failed, what more is to be done in the way of hearing and waiting? Many of you have listened to other preachers, equally earnest, equally tender, perhaps more so. Now, if all these have had no effect upon you, if waiting at the pool has done nothing for you, is it not a forlorn and helpless mode of procedure? Is it not time that something better were tried than merely waiting for the troubling of the water? Is it not time that you remembered that Jesus Christ is ready to save you now, and that if you now trust in Him, you shall this very day have everlasting life?

There lies our poor friend, still waiting at the water's edge. I do not blame *him* for waiting, for Jesus had not been there before, and it was right for him to seize even the most slender chance of a cure. But it was sad that Jesus should have been so slighted—there He went, threading His way among the blind, and the halt, and the lame, and looking benignly upon them all, but none looking up to Him. Now, in other places, soon as Jesus made His appearance, they brought the sick in their beds and laid them at His feet, and as He went along He healed them all, scattering mercies with both His hands.

A blindness had come over these people at the pool. There they were, and there was Christ, who could heal them, but not a single one of them sought Him. Their eyes were fixed on the water, expecting it to be troubled. They were so taken up with their own chosen way that the true way was neglected. No mercies were distributed, for none were sought.

Ah! my friends, my sorrowful question is, *shall it be so this morning?* The living Christ is still among us in the energy of His eternal Spirit. Will you be looking to your good works? Will you be trusting to your church-goings and your chapel-goings? Will you rely upon expected emotions, impressions, and fits of terror, and let Christ, who is able to save to the uttermost, have no glimpse of faith from any eye, no prayer of desire from any heart? If it shall be so, it is heart-breaking to think of it. Men, with an Almighty Physician in their house, dying while they are amused with a hopeless quackery of their own inventing. O poor souls, shall Bethesda be repeated here this morning, and Jesus Christ, the present Savior, be again neglected?

If a king should give to one of his subjects a ring, and say to him, “When you are in distress or disgrace, simply send me that ring, and I will do all for you that is needful”—if that man should willfully refuse to send it, but purchase presents, or go about to do some singular feats of valor in order to win his monarch’s favor, you would say, “What a fool he is. Here is a simple way, but he will not avail himself of it, he wastes his wits in inventing new devices, and toils away his life in following out plans that must end in disappointment.” Is not this the case with all those who refuse to trust Christ? The Lord has assured them that if they trust Jesus, they shall be saved. But they go about after ten thousand imaginings, and let their God, their Savior, go.

Meanwhile the sick man, so often disappointed, was *growing into deep despair*. Moreover he was becoming *old*. For thirty-eight years is a long time out of a man’s life. He felt that he should soon die. The brittle thread was nearly snapped, and so as the days and nights wearily wore on, though he waited, it became heavy work to wait.

My friend, is not this your case? Life is wearing away with you. Are there not grey hairs here and there? You have waited all this while in vain, and I warn you that you have sinfully waited. You have seen others saved. Your child is saved, your wife is converted, but you are not. You are waiting, and will wait, I fear, till the tune of, “Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes,” and the dirt shall rattle on your coffin lid, and your soul shall be in hell.

Do not, I pray you, play with time any longer. Say not, “There is time enough,” for the wise man knows that time enough is little enough. Be not like the foolish drunkard who, staggering home one night, saw his candle lit for him. “Two candles!” said he, for his drunkenness made him see double, “I will blow out one,” and as he blew it out, in a moment he was in the dark. Many a man sees double through the drunkenness of sin—he thinks that he has one life to sow his wild oats in, and then the last part of life in which to turn to God. So, like a fool, he blows out the only candle that he has, and in the dark he will have to lie down forever. Haste thee, traveler, you have but one sun, and when that sets, you will never reach your home. God help you to make haste now!

II. Let us look at THE PHYSICIAN Himself.

As we have already seen, our Lord on this occasion walked, forgotten and neglected, through that throng of impotent folk, no one crying, “Son of David, have mercy upon me!” No struggling woman seeking to touch the hem of His garment, that she might be made whole! All were desirous of being healed, but either no one knew or no one trusted Him. What a strange, soul-sickening sight it was, for Jesus was quite able and willing to heal, and to do it all without fee or reward, and yet none sought to Him.

Is this scene to be repeated this morning? Jesus Christ is able to save you, my hearers. There is no heart so hard that He cannot soften it. There is no man among you so lost that Jesus cannot save him. Blessed be my dear Master, no case ever did defeat Him. His mighty power reaches beyond the uttermost of all the depths of human sin and folly. If there be a harlot here, Christ can cleanse her. If there be a drunkard or a thief here, the blood of Jesus can make him white as snow. If you have any desire towards Him, you have not gone beyond the reach of His pierced hand. If you are not saved, it is certainly not for want of power in the Savior.

Moreover, your poverty is no hindrance, for my Master asks nothing from you—the poorer the wretch, the more welcome to Christ. My Master is no covetous priest, who demands pay for what He does—He forgives us freely. He wants none of your merits, nothing whatever from you. Come as you are to Him, for He is willing to receive you as you are.

But here is my sorrow and complaint, this *Blessed Lord Jesus, though present to heal, receives no attention from the most of men*. They are looking another way, and have no eyes for Him. *Yet Jesus was not angry*. I do not find that He upbraided one of those who lay in the porches, or that He even thought a hard thought of them. But I am sure that He pitied them, and said in His heart, “Alas! poor souls, that they should not know when mercy is so near!”

My Master is not wrathful with you who forget Him and neglect Him, but He pities you from His heart. I am but His poor servant, but I pity, from my inmost heart, those of you who live without Christ. I would gladly weep for you who are trying other ways of salvation, for they will all end in disappointment, and if continued in, will prove to be your eternal destruction.

Observe very carefully what the Savior did. Looking around among the whole company, *He made an election*. He had a right to make what choice He pleased, and He exercised that sovereign prerogative. The Lord is not bound to give His mercy to everyone, or to anyone. He has freely proclaimed it to you all. But as you reject it, He has now a double right to bless His chosen ones by making them willing in the day of His power.

The Savior selected that man out of the great multitude, we know not why, but certainly for a reason founded in grace. If we might venture to give a reason for His choice, it may be that He selected him because his was the worst case, and he had waited the longest of all. This man's case was in everybody's mouth. They said, "This man has been there eight-and-thirty years." Our Lord acted according to His own eternal purpose, doing as He pleased with His own. He fixed the eye of His electing love upon that one man, and going up to him, He gazed upon him. He knew all his history. He knew that he had been a long time in that case, and therefore He pitied him much. He thought of those dreary months and years of painful disappointment which the impotent man had suffered, and the tears were in the Master's eyes. He looked and looked again at that man, and His heart yearned towards him.

Now, I know not whom Christ intends to save this morning by His effectual grace. I am bound to give the general call, it is all that I can do, and I know not where the Lord will give the effectual call, which alone can make the Word saving. I should not wonder if He should call some of you who have been waiting long. I will bless His name if He does. I should not marvel if electing love should pitch upon the chief of sinners this day. If Jesus should look on some of you who never looked on Him, His look shall make *you* look, and His pity shall make you have pity upon yourselves, and His irresistible grace shall make you come to Him that you may be saved.

Jesus performed an act of sovereign distinguishing grace. I pray you do not kick at this doctrine! If you do, I cannot help it, for it is true. I have preached the Gospel to every one of you as freely as man can do it, and surely you who reject it ought not to quarrel with God for bestowing on others that which you do not care to receive. If you desire His mercy, He will not deny it to you. If you seek Him He will be found of you. But if you will not seek mercy, rail not at the Lord if He bestows it upon others.

Jesus, having looked upon this man with a special eye of regard, said to Him, "Will you be made whole?" I have already hinted that this was not said because Christ wanted information, but because He wished *to arouse the man's attention*. On account of its being the Sabbath, the man was not thinking of being cured, for to the Jew it seemed a most unlikely thing that cures should be wrought on a Sabbath day. Jesus, therefore brought his thoughts back to the matter in hand. For, mark you, the work of grace is a work upon a *conscious mind*, not upon senseless matter.

Though Puseyites pretend to regenerate unconscious children by sprinkling their faces with water, Jesus never attempted such a thing—Jesus saves men who have the use of their senses—and His salvation is a work upon a quickened intellect and awakened affections. Jesus brought back the wandering mind with the question, "Will you be made whole?" "Indeed," the man might have said, "indeed, I desire it above all things—I long for it—I pant for it."

Now, my dear hearer, I will ask the same question of you. "Will you be made whole? Do you desire to be saved? Do you know what being saved is?" "Oh," you say, "it is escaping from hell." No, no, no. That is the result of being saved, but being saved is a different thing. Do you want to be saved from the power of sin? Do you desire to be saved from being covetous, worldly-minded, bad-tempered, unjust, ungodly, domineering, drunken, or profane? Are you willing to give up the sin that is dearest to you? "No," says one, "I cannot honestly say I desire all that." Then you are not the man I am seeking this morning.

But is there one here who says, “Yes, I long to be rid of sin, root and branch. I desire, by God’s grace, this very day to become a Christian, and to be saved from sin.” Well, then, as you are already in a state of thoughtfulness, let us go a step further, and observe what the Savior did. *He gave the word of command*, saying, “Rise! Take up your bed and walk.” The power by which the man arose was not in himself, but in Jesus. It was not the mere sound of the words which made him rise, but it was the divine power which went with it.

I do believe that Jesus still speaks through His ministers. I trust that He speaks through *me* at this moment, when in His name I say to you who have been waiting at the pool, wait no longer, but this moment believe in Jesus Christ! Trust Him now. I know that my word will not make you do it, but if the Holy Ghost works through the word, you will believe. Trust Christ now, poor sinner. Believe that He is able to save you. Believe it now! Rely upon Him to save you this moment. Repose upon Him now! If you are enabled to believe, the power will come from Him, not from you. And your salvation will be effected, not by the sound of the word, but by the secret power of the Holy Ghost which goes with that word.

I pray you observe that although nothing is said about faith in the text, yet *the man must have had faith*. Suppose you had been unable to move hand or foot for thirty-eight years, and someone said at your bedside, “Rise!” You would not think of trying to rise, you would know it to be impossible. You must have faith in the person who uttered the word, or else you would not make the attempt.

I think I see the poor man—there he is, a heap, a writhing bundle of tortured nerves and powerless muscles. Yet Jesus says, “Rise!” and up he rises in a moment. “Take up your bed,” says the Master, and the bed is carried. Here was the man’s faith. The man was a Jew, and he knew that, according to the Pharisees, it would be a very wicked thing for him to roll up his mattress and carry it on the Sabbath. But because Jesus told him, he asked no questions, but doubled up his couch, and walked. He did what he was told to do because he believed in Him who spoke. Have *you* such faith in Jesus, poor sinner? Do you believe that Christ can save you? If you do, then I say to you in His name, trust Him! Trust Him now! If you trust Jesus, you shall be saved this morning—saved on the spot, and saved forever.

Observe, beloved friends, that *the cure which Christ wrought was perfect*. The man could carry his bed. The restoration was proved to a demonstration, the cure was manifest. All could see it. Moreover, the cure was *immediate*. He was not told to take a lump of figs, and put it on the sore, and wait. He was not carried home by his friends, and laid up for a month or two, and gradually nursed into vital energy. Oh, no! He was cured then and there.

Half our professing Christians imagine that regeneration cannot take place in a moment. And therefore they say to poor sinners, “Go and lie at Bethesda’s pool. Wait in the use of ordinances. Humble yourself. Seek deeper repentance.” Beloved, away with such teaching! The cross! The cross! The cross! There hangs a sinner’s hope! You must not rely on what you can do, nor on what angels can do, nor on visions and dreams, nor on feelings and strange emotions, and horrible deliriums, but you must rest in the blood of my Master and my God, once slain for sinners. There is life in a look at the Crucified One, but there is life nowhere else. I come to the same point, then, upon the second head as the first. Thus says the Lord, “Look unto me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth.”

III. Thirdly, we have to APPLY THE INSTANCE IN THE TEXT TO THE PRESENT OCCASION.

I hope, believers, your hearts are going up in prayer this morning. What a scene is before us! If someone had told us that this mass of people [approximately twenty thousand souls] would have gathered to listen to the Gospel, are there not hundreds who would have doubted it? Mark this, we have had nothing novel to attract this multitude—nothing by way of gorgeous ceremony. There is not even the swell of the organ—I declined its pealing notes lest we should seem to depend in the slightest degree from a thread even to a shoe latchet, upon anything but the preaching of the Gospel. The preaching of the cross is enough to draw the people, and enough to save the people, and if we take to anything else, we lose our power and shear away the locks which make us strong.

The application of the text, this morning, is just this—*Why should we not on this very spot have instantaneous cures of sick souls?* Why should there not be scores, hundreds, thousands, who shall this morning hear the gracious word, “Arise, take up your bed and walk”? I believe it is possible. I hope it will be done. Let me talk with you who doubt this matter. You still think that you must wait—you have had a sufficient spell of waiting, and you are getting tolerably weary, but still you stick to the old plan. Hopeless as it is, you still catch at it as drowning men do at straws.

But I want to show you that this is all wrong. Regeneration is an instantaneous work, and justification an instantaneous gift. *Man fell in a moment.* When Eve plucked the fruit, and Adam ate it, it did not require six months to bring them into a state of condemnation. It did not require several years of continued sin to cast them out of paradise. Their eyes were opened by the forbidden fruit. They saw that they were naked, and they hid themselves from God. Surely, surely, Christ is not to be longer about His work than the devil was about his. Shall the devil destroy us in a moment, and Jesus be unable to save us in a moment! Ah! glory be to God, He has power to deliver far more ample than any which Satan uses for man’s destruction.

Look at the *biblical illustrations* of what salvation is. I will only mention three. Noah built an ark. That was a type of salvation. Now, when was Noah saved? Christ has built the ark for us. We have nothing to do with building that, but when was Noah saved? Does anyone say, “He was safe after he had been in the ark a month and had arranged all the things and looked out on the deluge and felt his danger.” No! The moment Noah went through the door, and the Lord shut him in, Noah was safe. When he had been in the ark a second he was as secure as when he had been there a month.

Take the case of the Passover. When were the Jews safe from the destroying angel who went through the land of Egypt? Were they safe after the blood which was sprinkled on the door had been looked upon and considered for a week or two? Oh, no! beloved, the moment the blood was sprinkled the house was secured. And the moment a sinner believes and trusts in the crucified Son of God he is pardoned at once, he receives salvation in full through Christ’s blood.

One more instance, the brazen serpent. When the bronze serpent was lifted up, what were the wounded to do? Were they told to wait till the brazen serpent was pushed into their faces, or until the venom of the serpent showed certain symptoms in their flesh? No, they were commanded to look. They did look. Were they healed in six months’ time? I read not so, but as soon as their eye met the serpent of brass, the cure was wrought—and as soon as your eye meets Christ, poor trembler, you are saved. Though yesterday you were deep in your cups, and up to your neck in sin, yet if this morning you look to my once slain but now exalted Master, you shall find eternal life.

Again take *Biblical instances*. Did the dying thief wait at the pool of the ordinances? You know how soon his believing prayer was heard, and Jesus said, “Today you shall be with me in paradise.” The three thousand at Pentecost, did they wait for some great thing? Nay, they believed, and were baptized. Look at the jailer of Philippi. It was the dead of the night, the prison was shaken, and the jailer was alarmed, and said, “Sir, what must I do to be saved?” Did Paul say, “Well, you must use the means and look for a blessing upon the ordinances”? No! He said, “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house,” and that very night he baptized him. Paul did not take the time about it that some think so exceedingly necessary. He believed as I do, that there is life in a *look* at Jesus. He bade men look, and looking they lived.

Possibly you will see this still more clearly if I remind you that *the work of salvation is all done*. There is nothing for a sinner to do in order to be saved, it is all done for him. You need washing. The bath does not need filling. “There is a fountain filled with blood.” You want clothing. You have not to make the garment, the robe is ready. The garment of Christ’s righteousness is woven from the top throughout, all that is wanted is to have it put on. If some work remained for you to do it might be a lengthened process, but all the doing is accomplished by Christ. Salvation is not of works, but of grace, and to accept what Christ presents you is not a work of time.

Once more, let me say to you that *regeneration itself cannot be a work of a long time*, because, even where it seems to be most gradual, when looked at closely, it turns out in its essence to be the work of a moment. There is a dead man. Now, if that man be raised from the dead, there must be an instant in which he was dead, and another instant in which he was alive. The actual quickening must be the work of a moment. I grant you that at the first the life may be very feeble, but there must be a time when it begins. There must be a line—we cannot always see it ourselves, but God must see it—there must be a line between life and death. A man cannot be somewhere between dead and alive. He either is alive or he is dead. And so you are either dead in sin or alive unto God, and quickening cannot involve a long period of time.

Finally, my hearers, *for God to say, “I forgive you,” takes not a century nor a year*. The judge pronounces the sentence, and the criminal is acquitted. If God shall say to you this morning, “I absolve you,” you are absolved, and you may go in peace. I must bear faithful witness as to my own case. I never found mercy by waiting. I never obtained a gleam of hope by depending upon ordinances. I found salvation by believing. I heard a simple minister of the Gospel say, “Look and live! Look to Jesus! He bleeds in the garden, He dies on the tree! Trust Him! Trust to what He suffered instead of you. And if you trust Him, you shall be saved.”

The Lord knows I had *heard* that Gospel many times before, but I had not obeyed it. It came this time, however, with power to my soul, and I did look, and the moment I looked to Christ, I lost my burden. “But” says one, “how do you know?” Did you ever carry a burden yourself? “Oh, yes,” say you. Did you know when it was off? How did you know? “Oh,” you say, “I felt so different. I knew when my burden was on, and consequently, I knew when it was off.”

It was so in my case, too. I only wish some of you felt the burden of sin as I felt it, when I was waiting at the pool of Bethesda. I wonder that such waiting had not landed me in hell. But when I heard the word, “Look!” I looked, and my burden was gone. I wondered where it was gone. I have never seen it since, and I never shall see it again. It went into the Master’s tomb, and it lies forever buried there.

God has said it, “I have blotted out like a cloud your iniquities, and like a thick cloud your sins.” Oh, come, you needy, come to my Master! You who have been disappointed with rites and ceremonies, and feelings, and impressions, and all the hopes of the flesh—come at my Master’s command, and look up to Him! He is not here in the flesh, for He has risen. But He has risen to plead for sinners, and “He is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them.”

Oh, if I could know how to preach the Gospel so that you would feel it, I would go to any school to learn! The Lord knows I would willingly consent to lose these eyes to get greater power in my ministry. Ay, and to lose arms, legs, and all my members. I would be willing to die if I could but be honored by the Holy Spirit to win this mass of souls to God. I implore you, my brethren, you who have power in prayer, pray the Lord to bring sinners to Christ.

Let me say, solemnly, to you who have heard the Word this day, I have told you the plan of salvation plainly. If you do not accept it, I am clear of your blood, I shake my skirts of the blood of your souls. If you come not to my Lord and Master, I must bear swift witness against you at the day of judgment. I have told you the way—I cannot tell you it more simply—I beseech you to follow it! I entreat you to look to Jesus!

But if you refuse it, at any rate, when you shall rise from the dead and stand before the great white throne, do me the justice to say that I did entreat and persuade you to escape, I did impress upon you to flee from the wrath to come.

The Lord save each one of you, and His shall be the praise ever more. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 3:14-21, JOHN 5:1-9.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.